

## Quinque One Half: The Loss of One

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## Quinque One Half: The Loss of One

Untitled Disclaimer: Everyone who has been on the show The Real Adventures of Jonny Quest belongs to HB and everyone you don't recognize belongs to me.

Author's Note: This story was written after \_Quinque #1: The Loss of Innocence\_. Therefore I didn't go into as much detail about the world Quinque lives in. If you get thoroughly lost, I would recommend reading #1, and then coming back to this one.

### \*\*Prologue\*\*

The year is 2015. The world as we know it no longer exists.

In 2003, Ezekial Rage launched nuclear bombs from China at Cairo, London, Moscow, and Tokyo. The targeted cities retaliated before asking questions. By 2005, the world economy had collapsed, and the United States government fell apart. The former superpower has split into two warring halves, Dulab and Zinja.

The new America is one of hardships and struggles. Warfare has decimated most of the population between the ages of 35 and 65 and has drained the continent of its natural resources. The young and hardy have quickly risen through the ranks to become the new leaders. They are strong, smart, and willing to do anything they have to if it means the end of the war.

Dulab, consisting of the former states of Ohio, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, South Dakota, and Montana, is dedicated to upholding life as they knew it before the war. They are led by Commander Bennett and Roger "Race" Bannon, men well acquainted with military expeditions. Zinja, made of the states of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Utah,

Colorado, and Kansas, has fallen under the rule of a madman named Dr. Zin. Zin's ultimate goal is global domination, starting with the fall of Dulab.

The Dulabian's fight back courageously. They have organized Task Forces composed of their best young freedom fighters. As Quinque, the most elite Task Force, Jonathan Quest, Jessica Bannon, Alexander Anderson, Dion Jennings, and Joshua Alana fight to defend and expand the Dulab territory against Zin. Quinque is passionately determined to resurrect the world they once knew.

**\*\*Quinque #1/2: The Loss of One\*\***

"Intelligence Command has heard rumors that Zin has discovered a pocket of crude oil near Amarillo, Texas," Hadji Singh informed. "Quinque is to investigate the area and see if the rumors are true or not."

Jonny Quest frowned. "We're being sent out to gather information?"

Hadji nodded.

"Why us then?" Jonny wondered. "There are other Task Forces who can do that as well as we can. Quinque's never been sent out as a watchdog before."

His brother leaned back in his chair. "I realize that, my friend. But the order came down from Race."

"What?" Jessie Bannon's green eyes widened. "This is his wish?"

"Yes, Caroline, it is, and I'm not going to start questioning him now. If you have an argument with the assignment, take it up with Race. Otherwise I expect Quinque to be on their way to Texas by tomorrow morning. Is that understood?"

Jonny and Jessie both nodded.

"Yes, Sultan," Jonny said.

Quinque stood and made their way out of Hadji's office.

"Surveillance?" Xander Anderson asked. "Did we do something to make Bannon mad at us? I mean, I know we weren't supposed to do anything at that base in New Mexico . . ."

Jessie sighed and shook her head. "I don't think it really has anything to do with Quinque, Stick. In fact, I think it more likely that it has everything to do with me."

"You'd think he'd have learned by now that you are your own woman." Josh Alana entered into the conversation. "You've been a member of Quinque ever since it was first formed nearly five years ago. And you're good at what you do -- the best behind me that is."

"Sure, Grizzly," Jess replied with a small grin. "But Bannon doesn't see it that way, unfortunately. All he sees is his little ponchita

going into hostile territory and trying to get herself killed." She sighed and shook her head. "But arguing with him is going to get us nowhere."

"We'll meet back here at nine o'clock tomorrow morning and be on our way," Jonny said.

Xander, Dion, and Josh nodded and then left Jonny and Jessie.

"Did you really think Race would just stop caring about you?" Jonny wondered as they walked down the hallway.

"No, I suppose not," Jessie admitted, and pushed the down button for the elevator. "Though sometimes it would be easier if he just forgot he had a daughter."

"Or a son," Jonny reminded. "He might not be my real father, but he's been one to me ever since . . . " He trailed off. Even after all these years, he still found it difficult to say that his father, Dr. Benton Quest, was dead.

Jessie squeezed his hand lightly. "Or his son," she acknowledged. "But that still doesn't excuse this assignment. Just because he's afraid to risk his children doesn't make him right. Quinque is the best Task Force he has. We shouldn't have to go look for some pocket of oil when we could be stopping Zin from launching nuclear weapons at Columbus."

The elevator doors opened and they stepped inside.

"Well, you know we can't do anything about his feelings," Jonny said.

Jessie's face darkened. "Sometimes I wonder if he still has any."

"That's unfair and you know it, Jess."

She closed her eyes and nodded. "I know, Apollo, I know. It's just hard. I remember the man he used to be, and I compare him to the man he has become. And I don't like the differences. Sometimes I wonder what Mom would say to him if she was still alive."

Estella Velasquez, Race's ex-wife, had been on an archeological dig in South America when the country had broken out into civil war after the fall of Rage's bombs. One of the first places destroyed was Estella's dig site because of her close association with a North American company -- Quest Enterprises.

"You can't change the past," Jonny intoned. "But the future is what you make it."

\* \* \*

At nine the next morning, Quinque gathered outside IC headquarters. Hadji had given them a jeep to use, but had made them promise that they would abandon it once they were fifty miles away from Amarillo. Out in west Texas, the dry land could kick up dust that could be seen for miles. They would have a hard enough time trying to sneak up to the site on foot. Throwing their bags into the back of the jeep, they

clambered onboard with Jessie at the wheel.

"All right," Dion signed as they drove off. "Why is Intelligence Command so worried about Zin finding a supply of oil?"

"Do you know how little fossil fuel is left?" Josh asked, looking at Dion.

Dion shrugged. "Enough?"

"Not enough," Jonny replied, turning his head to look back at Dion. "The wars have used up a lot of what we had stored, especially gasoline. Haven't you ever wondered why Dulab and Zinja don't really have any type of air force?"

"Hadn't really thought about it," Dion admitted.

"Unless one side managed to win, probably within a year's time, we're not too sure about the time limit, we would be completely out of gasoline. And that's something we can't afford," Jonny said.

"Why don't we just make more then?" Xander wondered.

"We can't," Josh answered. "There are only one or two processing plants still standing within Dulab. Even so, we don't know that they still work. Plus, I'm not sure that there's someone alive who even knows the process of converting crude oil to gasoline."

"Then how come we're worried about Zin finding oil?" Dion questioned.

"We may not have anyone who knows the process, but what if Zin does?" Jonny said. "Or even worse, what if Dr. Messiah has figured out a quick and cheap process? We all know what Zin's pet doctor is capable of."

Quinque nodded. They had all found themselves face to face with one of Dr. Messiah's inventions at some point in time during their adventures.

"Can you imagine what would happen if Zin suddenly had a very large and quite available amount of gasoline?"

Xander's eyes widened as he realized what Josh implied. "He would be able to launch an air attack that Dulab would be hard pressed to stop."

Jonny nodded grimly. "Exactly."

\* \* \*

Two and a half days later, Quinque hopped out of the jeep and shouldered their bags. From here to Amarillo they had only their feet for transportation. It would probably take them four days to reach Amarillo, especially since they were going to be moving carefully. They did not need to alert any of the Zinja Guard to their presence.

That night as they stopped to make camp, Jonny commanded that they would not make a fire. The land was so flat that the Guard would be

able to see a campfire, no matter how small.

Jonny took the first watch, his eyes straining to see through the darkness of the night. His sixth sense of danger was warning him about this whole mission. There was something wrong about it all. The first was that there was oil in west Texas. If he remembered Race's geography lessons correctly, he did not think west Texas, more exactly near Amarillo, was known for its abundant source of oil. If there was oil near Amarillo wouldn't have someone found it before the fall? Did Zin just go oil hunting and lo and behold there was this new pocket of oil that no one had found before? He frowned. Could it all be some sort of trap?

Staring out into the night, Jonny's mind raced as he tried to figure out exactly what Zin was planning.

\* \* \*

"Amarillo, ten miles," Xander read.

Jonny glanced at the sign and nodded. They had decided to walk along the edge of the highway. Hiding in a forest that lined the road was out of the question as there was no forest. Just more and more dry flat land. Anybody would be able to see them coming. And that was not a good thing when they didn't want to be seen.

"If Zin is drilling for oil, we should be able to see it from pretty far away," Jessie said. Looking around, she shook her head. "I don't understand how anyone could live here -- before or after the fall. There's nothing here."

"Texas Tech, which is in Lubbock, is about a hundred miles away from here," Dion replied. "Or is as much as there is any college anywhere these days."

"A college?" Jessie repeated, incredulous. "Out here in the middle of nowhere?"

"It's been known to happen," Dion replied with a small smile. "Ever been to College Station, Texas?"

Jessie blinked. "College Station? What kind of name is that?"

Dion gave a silent laugh. "It's where Texas A&M University was located. College Station used to be a very small town between Dallas and Houston. The college was originally built to help train military cadets. So all these people from Dallas would get on the train and not realize they had missed their stop until they reached Houston. Eventually the cadets got smart and put up a sign that said, 'College Station.' The name stuck."

Xander shook his head. "I suppose we could always stop at Texas City, Texas if we wanted to. Or how about Paris? Or Athens? Or even Cut-and-Shoot?"

Jonny held up a hand and the rest of Quinque fell silent.

"I heard it, too," Josh whispered to their leader.

"Heard what?" Dion signed.

"Helicopter," Jonny replied by the same means of communication. His eyes were scanning the horizon. "Come on, it's time to pick up the pace some. We need to get into the town before anyone realizes we're here."

Settling their bags onto their shoulders, Quinque started running along the lonely stretch of highway.

\* \* \*

They could just make out the town of Amarillo ahead of them when they finally caught sight of the helicopter Jonny and Josh had heard. It rose above the horizon line and headed unerringly straight toward them. Jonny's mouth tightened into a line as he urged Quinque to run faster. If they could make it into the town, they should be able to hide from anyone in the helicopter. Of course that was assuming the people in the helicopter didn't have any friends. Just then two jeeps, both carrying at least five members of the Zinja Guard, came into view. Under his breath, Jonny cursed.

"Split up," he commanded. "Xander and Jessie, Dion and Josh. Find someplace to hide until they stop searching. Keep in contact with your watches." He paused to look over his shoulder. There was no way they could outrun the jeeps. "Now!"

Instantly there were three groups running in separate directions. Xander and Jessie veered off to his right while Dion and Josh went in the opposite direction. Jonny glanced over his shoulder to see one of the jeeps taking off after Xander and Jessie. The other one kept after him. He pushed himself faster and the town drew nearer with each step. But he knew that the jeep would overtake him before he could reach the safety of Amarillo. All he could do was hope that the others would be able to escape.

Zigzagging, Jonny kept his eyes focused on the nearest building he could see. If he looked behind him, he would lose precious seconds. But it was less than a minute when he heard the jeep directly behind him.

"Stop!" one of the guards yelled.

The jeep was suddenly beside him, and then in front of him. Jonny had to stop running or else he would smack into the side of the vehicle. He leaned over, panting for breath as one of the guards jumped out of the jeep and neared.

"Why were you running from us, boy?" the guard demanded.

Jonny straightened. "My mother . . . " He stopped to take a deep breath. "Out there . . . " He flapped a hand in a general direction. "Sick . . . gotta get Grandma."

"Why didn't you stop for us, then?" The guard placed a hand on his holstered gun.

"Grandma help," Jonny insisted.

"Who were your friends?"

"Cousins. Mom needs help."

"Sure." The guard reached out towards Jonny. "Why don't you just come with me."

Jonny shoved the guard's hand away, took a step closer, and punched the guard in the jaw. The guard stumbled back, shocked, and Jonny took off. He heard the guards behind him start to shout, and one even gathered enough sense to fire at him. Bullets thumped harmlessly into the ground behind him. For a moment, the jeep's wheels spun in the dry dirt. Finally they dug in and the guards were after him again. With a burst of speed, Jonny reached the edge of the town. A feeling of confidence mixed with adrenaline rushed through him. Certainly he should be able to shake them in the city.

He ducked into an alley, and was met by a fist that hit him squarely in the jaw. Jonny fell to the ground, unconscious.

\* \* \*

Jonny groaned and slowly opened his eyes.

"About time you woke up," a voice to his left said.

Jonny looked around and saw an old man with thin white hair sitting behind a wooden desk. The man pushed his chair back, stood, and made his way next to Jonny. Shakily, Jonny sat up, waiting.

"I'm really sorry about your jaw," the man continued. "But those guards were after you, and it would have taken too long to answer all your questions before they found you."

Jonny wiggled his jaw and decided it wasn't broken. "Who are you?"

"The name's Marcus," the man replied. "Why were those guards after you?"

"Where are we?"

Marcus narrowed his brown eyes but replied, "Underground. It's the only place safe from the Zinja Guard now. You were lucky I happened to be in the alley right then, or else you would have been caught for sure. Now, I'll ask you again, why was the guard after you?"

Jonny paused, wondering what to tell the old man.

Marcus knitted his eyebrows in anger. "I saved your life for now, son, but don't think it was out of any kindness of my heart. You and the guards were too close to one of the entranceways to the underground. I'll take you back up and deposit you on the Guard's steps if you don't tell me what I want to know."

"Who do you work for?" Jonny asked.

Marcus snorted. "Myself. You don't think I run away from the Zinja Guards because they're my best friends, do you?"

"I'm here to do some sight seeing," Jonny replied slowly.

"Sight seeing?" Marcus raised an eyebrow. "Reconnaissance work you mean."

Jonny nodded. "Yes."

"And what exactly were you supposed to see?"

"Oil."

"Oil? Out here? I don't think so, son. If someone sold you that information you should see if he has some sort of refund policy."

Jonny gave the old man a small grin.

Just then the only door into the room opened and another old man pushed someone in.

"I found another one of them," the new man declared.

Marcus turned and over his shoulder Jonny caught a glance of Josh's face.

"Grizzly," Jonny said. "Nice to see you again. Where's Pudge?"

With a sharply inhaled breath, Marcus looked back Jonny. "Task Force."

Jonny nodded sanguinely.

"Which one?" Marcus demanded.

"Pudge was captured," Josh replied, ignoring the presence of the two old men. "I don't know about Caroline and Stick."

"Which Task Force?" Marcus repeated, his voice harsh.

Jonny met Josh's green eyes, and then turned to look at the old man who had taken a threatening step towards him.

"Quinque."

Marcus took a step away from Jonny and muttered a few curses under his breath. For a moment Jonny stopped to wonder if one of those curses was anatomically possible . . . his thoughts were interrupted as Marcus punched him in the stomach.

Jonny doubled over, fighting for a breath. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Josh being restrained by the old man who had brought him in.

"Who are you?" Marcus growled.

"Apollo," Jonny gasped.

Marcus took two steps backwards, his eyes wide. "Apollo?"

Still trying to regain his breath, Jonny only nodded.

"Paul?" Marcus glanced at the man who held Josh. "What do you think?"



"Proof," Paul declared.

Marcus nodded and turned his attention back to Jonny. "Like Paul said, give us some proof that you are who you claim."

"What do you want me to say?" Jonny asked sarcastically. "I don't exactly have a driver's license."

"Tell me something about Bannon I don't know," Marcus demanded.

Jonny paused. "He once killed a man with his bare hands."

Marcus blinked. "Who did Bannon work for before the fall?"

"Intelligence One -- like you."

That stopped everyone in the room.

"Why do you think I worked for Intelligence One, son?" Marcus wondered.

"One, because you were able to knock me out with only one punch, and that's quite an impressive feat for someone your age unless you've had training," Jonny began. "Two, you've been able to create an underground resistance force that has been able to hide from the Zinja Guard for ten years. Three, you asked for proof based on Bannon."

"That doesn't mean anything," Marcus interrupted.

"Four, you have a picture of you and Phil Corbin hanging on the wall behind your desk."

Marcus gaped. "You knew Phil Corbin?"

"He was Race's boss," Jonny said. "I met him once or twice."

"Who are you?" Marcus wondered.

"File 0-37," Jonny stated simply.

Marcus paused, and then his face grew pale. He glanced over his shoulder and saw the same astonished look on Paul's face. "But File 0-37 was . . . "

" . . . terminated?" Jonny interrupted. "In a sense, but you shouldn't believe everything you hear."

File 0-37 was the assignment that had first brought Race to the Quest's doorstep. Jonny's mother, Rachel, had recently been killed, and the government had deemed it necessary to protect Dr. Quest and his son at all costs.

"But . . . then . . . that would make you . . . no wonder . . . oh my," Marcus finished lamely.

Jonny kept his eyes averted from Josh's confused gaze. He knew that his teammate would demand some sort of explanation once they were alone.

Marcus took a deep breath. "All right, so some of your Task Force is missing?"

"Yes." Jonny quickly told the two men the code names of his teammates.

Marcus and Paul exchanged glances.

"We'll see what we can find out for you," Paul declared.

"You two wait down here," Marcus said. "Someone will be by in a little while with some food. And I'll come back once we know where your friends are being kept."

Jonny nodded. "Thanks."

Quietly Jonny and Josh watched the two old men leave the room, locking the door behind them. Then Josh, his green eyes narrowed in hidden anger, turned toward Jonny.

"File 0-37?" he asked. "Do you have any idea as to what you're talking about, Apollo? Because if you're stringing these guys along and they find out about it . . ."

"I'm not stringing them along, Grizzly. I know all about File 0-37."

"What is it?"

Jonny shook his head. "I'm sorry, but I can't tell you that. It's a matter of national security."

"There is no nation anymore," Josh replied hotly. "And if it's so confidential, how do you know about it?"

Jonny closed his eyes and lay down on the bed. Of all the members of Quinque he could be stuck with, he would have to be left with Josh. At twenty-seven, Josh had joined Quinque a little over seven months ago. Since he had been on a Task Force before Quinque and since he was four years older than Jonny, Josh often felt that he should be Quinque's leader. His attitude caused a lot of contention between the two of them. And right now, Jonny was not in the mood to fight. There were too many other things to worry about.

"Apollo," Josh said, exasperated. "I have the right to know what's going on."

"I'm sorry, Grizzly, but I can't tell you anything."

"You certainly didn't seem to have any problem with telling two strangers that we just met five minutes ago! We have absolutely no proof that they worked with Intelligence One."

"Marcus never would have known what I was talking about if he hadn't," Jonny argued. "And they knew Bannon."

"So what? Apollo, you can't trust everyone. One time or another you are going to get seriously burned."

Jonny gave a frustrated sigh. "Look, Grizzly, I know how you feel about me and my position in this Task Force. You've made it quite clear that you would like to be the leader. But the truth of the matter is that right now you're not. You can make a case to Bannon when we get back, but for now you are under my command. I didn't become leader just because of my good looks and gigantic ego. Thus when I tell you to drop something, you will drop it. Do I make myself clear?"

Josh nodded stiffly. "Yes, Apollo."

"Good. Then I suggest that we both should get some sleep. I have the feeling it's going to be a long night."

\* \* \*

Jonny woke the instant he heard the lock on their door being pushed open. He glanced at his watch and saw that two hours had passed. Sitting up, he yawned as Marcus and Paul entered the room, carrying two sandwiches and a thermos.

"Hope you like tuna fish." Marcus threw one of the sandwiches at Jonny, who deftly caught it. "And there's only water to drink."

"Sounds like a feast at the moment," Jonny replied. "What did you find out?"

"Pretty much what we already suspected. The rest of your team has been captured."

"Are they still in Amarillo?" Jonny wondered.

Marcus nodded. "For a little while longer at least. I don't think they'll move them until they get word from Zin. That should give us until tomorrow morning."

"How long until dark?" Jonny asked.

"About half an hour."

Jonny glanced over at Josh. "Time to change. We're going in." He caught Marcus' eye. "Think you can create a diversion for us?"

\* \* \*

"First things first," Jonny whispered. "Time to see if we can pick them up on our watches."

Josh hit a button on the side of his Q-faced watch. "I got them. As long as they're still with their watches, they're in the building right in front of us."

"Good. Now we just wait until things break into complete chaos."

They had changed into black jeans and shirts, and Jonny had pulled a

tight black cap over his electric blonde hair. For a moment, Jonny pondered the irony of the situation. Usually it was Quinque who was breaking in to rescue him, not the other way. But there was a first time for everything.

Suddenly shots and shouts riddled the compound. Jonny looked at Josh and tilted his head, letting him know it had started. It was time for them to move.

Most of the guards were running toward the front of the compound thanks to Marcus' resistance force. Unfortunately, a few of the guards had decided to hold their ground in the back. Jonny motioned that Josh should take out the three remaining guards. Josh raised the gun Marcus had given him earlier and in three quick shots, the guards were lying on the ground.

Jonny nodded and then ran into the compound, Josh on his heels. As swiftly and cautiously as they could, they moved the bodies of the guards into a nearby dark corner. They knew that eventually someone would stumble onto them, but hopefully not until they were already out. Hastily they changed outfits with two of the dead guards. Jonny could not help but shudder as he slipped on the black and gray uniform of the Zinja Guard.

Josh glanced at his watch right before they started toward the main building. Marcus had promised them ten minutes of distraction, and a minute and a half of that had already passed. He believed that Apollo's plan wouldn't work, but Apollo wouldn't listen to reason. Just because he was the leader of Quinque, he thought he knew everything. Apollo had secrets. Of course, they all had some secrets, but Apollo seemed to have more than most. Heck, he didn't even know Apollo's real name. There were just too many secrets. He shook his head slightly. Now was not the time for his emotions to rear up in anger. They had to free their teammates. After that Apollo and him could try and work things out between them. Following Apollo, they entered into the building.

There were guards everywhere, frantically running around, trying to figure out what was going on. Jonny looked at Josh, who immediately traced Caroline's signal. Josh pointed down the hallway, and Jonny nodded.

Together they started running, mixing in with all the other members of the guard. As long as they wore the right uniforms, no one would give them a second glance. Or so they hoped. Josh took the lead, relying on his watch to tell them where the others were.

Behind Josh, Jonny watched the guards around them. They could not afford to do anything suspicious. If they messed up for even a second, the guards would be all over them, like bees to honey. Just then a hand clamped down on Jonny's shoulder, jerking him to a stop. Josh glanced over his shoulder, and with his eyes, Jonny told him to continue on. Jonny looked up at the man who had grabbed him.

He was a large man and easily a foot taller than Jonny. His bald head gleamed under the halogen lights in the hallway.

"Yes, sir?" Jonny asked, trying to look innocent.

"Come with me, cadet," the man commanded.

The man let go of Jonny's shoulder and started walking away. After a quick pause, Jonny followed. He knew that Josh would find the others and he could join them later. And if he got into trouble they would be able to locate him with their watches. A few minutes later, they stepped into the main communications center. Jonny stopped, his eyes wide as he stared at all the electronic equipment in the room. The man pushed him toward a chair.

"Try to reach Austin, cadet," the man said, naming the capitol of Zinja. "They need to know what's going on."

"Yes, sir," Jonny automatically replied, reaching toward a headset.

As the man turned away, Jonny looked around, trying to commit to memory everything he saw. There were monitors showing the hallways and rooms of the building. He gave a soft groan knowing they were bound to have a security camera on the door leading to Quinque. Well, if he was going to be stuck in this room, he might as well make it worth his time. Placing the headset on over his ears, he turned toward the radio and made it look like he was trying to reach Austin. In reality, he was scanning the televisions, trying to catch sight of Josh.

"Did you get a hold of Austin?" the man asked.

"Yes, sir." Jonny looked up at him. "They said they'd send reinforcements, but that they couldn't get here for another two hours, sir."

The man cursed under his breath. "That's what I thought they'd say. Cadet, can you move the cameras so that we can get a look at who's attacking us?"

"Yes, sir." Jonny rolled the chair across the room to a computer. "It will take me a few minutes, sir."

The man nodded and reached for a phone. "Let me know when you have something, cadet."

"Of course, sir." Jonny's fingers were already flying across the keyboard.

He really did not plan on showing the man the resistance force outside. Glancing at the clock on the computer, he saw that he only had four more minutes until Marcus would lead everyone away. He had to act fast.

Pulling up a program from the mainframe, he punched in a few simple commands. With a small lopsided grin, he watched as all of the televisions in the room went black.

"Cadet, what happened?"

"I'm not sure, sir. It looks like someone cut the power to some of our communication devices." Jonny shook his head as he failed to get anything from the computer. "I need to go look, sir."

The man nodded. "You have five minutes, cadet. And I expect some sort

of answer when you get back."

"Yes, sir." Jonny saluted and then ran out of the room.

He had spotted Josh right before the monitors had gone blank, and he had learned the general layout of the compound while watching, so he knew exactly where to go. And no one should be able to see him. Turning on his watch, he smiled with satisfaction. Josh was right in front of him. Rounding a corner, he saw Josh kneeling beside a door, using his laser to cut through the lock.

"Grizzly," Jonny called.

Josh started at the sound of his voice, and then gave a small grin in relief. "Apollo, it's good to see you. No one has bothered me yet, but I don't know how long we have until we get company." He pointed to a nearby security camera.

"Don't worry about it," Jonny replied. "I took care of them. They won't be seeing anything until someone who knows what they're doing comes along and reboots the system."

Josh raised an eyebrow. "You've been busy."

"Uh huh," Jonny agreed. He motioned toward the door. "How's it going?"

"Almost . . . there." With that word, the lock fell to the ground and the door swung open.

Jessie, Xander, and Dion ran out of the room, smiling and hugging their teammates. Jonny handed Jessie the gun he had taken off the dead guard, and looked at his watch.

"Two and a half minutes left, Grizzly," he stated.

"Until what?" Jessie wondered.

"Later," Jonny answered. "Do we need to get anyone's things?"

Jessie shook her head. "No one brought their computers or cell phones on this one. If they go through our bags, all they'll find is a bunch of clothes."

"Good. Then we're out of here. To the Batmobile, Robin," Jonny quipped.

"What kind of plan did you two cook up?" Xander asked as they made their way through the building.

"We're going to take a helicopter back home," Jonny replied.

"And how exactly are we going to get a helicopter?" Dion questioned.

"Uh, Apollo," Josh interrupted. "Do you know where we're going?"

Jonny nodded. He had memorized the route while in the communications

room.

"But didn't we see the helicopter pads on the west side of the building?" Josh said.

"Uh huh."

"Then why are we headed north?"

"Because this way is the least traveled," Jonny replied calmly.

Josh stopped. "And how would you know that?"

Jonny turned to see Josh glaring at him, his hands on his hips. "Grizzly, this isn't exactly the time or place to start arguing with me."

"Look, Apollo, you might think you're always right, but you're not. Now, I'm going to meet you out at the helicopter pads, but I'm going to find it my own way." He started walking away from the group.

"Grizzly," Xander implored. "Can't you trust Apollo for once?"

"No." Josh's word echoed back to them as he started to turn a corner.

Then his body jerked backwards and he slumped to the floor, his chest covered in red blood. Quinque watched in shock as a Zinja Guard stepped into view, his gun smoking. The guard saw them and raised his gun, but Jessie had already recovered and fired a shot. They all watched as the guard silently fell next to Josh.

Jonny broke out of his shock and sprinted to where Josh lay.

"Grizzly," he whispered, looking sadly down at his teammate.

Quickly he glanced around for something to press against the wound, but nothing immediately came into view. He placed his hands over the hole in the middle of Josh's chest, trying to stop the bleeding.

"Apollo." Josh's voice was quiet, making Jonny lean in to catch his words. "I'm sorry. You were right."

"You're going to be all right."

The rest of Quinque had gathered around them by this time. Jessie put her hands on Jonny's shoulders.

"Not enough time." Josh's words were starting to slur. "Go . . . before Marcus . . ."

"Not without you," Jonny replied, his voice harsher than he expected. "I won't leave you here."

"No choice . . . " Josh coughed and blood bubbled at the corner of his mouth. " . . . lead Apollo . . . "

Josh's eyes closed and his breathing stopped. Jonny looked blankly at him, not quite believing what his eyes told him.

"No, Grizzly." He could not hold back the tears that suddenly ran down his cheeks.

"Apollo." Jessie tugged on his arm. "We've got to leave."

"Grizzly." Jonny looked up at her, his expression lost.

She felt her heart break a little at the look on his face. "We have to leave him here. Apollo, I'm sorry."

Jonny took a deep breath, laid a hand on Josh's chest, and then stood up, nodding. "Let's go."

The four ran through the building, following the path Jonny had noted before. Outside Marcus and the resistance still fought the Zinja Guard. And directly in front of them stood an abandoned helicopter. Jonny shook his head, trying to hold back more tears. Luck. Sometimes that's all there was to it.

Glancing at his watch, Jonny saw they had thirty seconds left to spare. It was then that he noticed his hands were covered in Josh's blood. He looked back to see a trail of blood that had dripped from the tips of his fingers. The blood mixed with the dirt, and he was sure there was some kind of circle of life thing going on if he stopped to think about it. But he didn't -- he couldn't, not right now. How was he going to explain this to Race? His throat tightened in anguish. Grizzly.

Jessie shoved him onto the helicopter and she took the controls. Within seconds they were in the air, heading back toward Dulab. But Jonny's heart ached for the loss of the one they had left on the floor of a Zinja compound.

\* \* \*

Jonny stared straight ahead as Jessie recounted all that she knew about the mission. She told Sultan and Race how they had been captured, gassed, and then, when they had finally regained conscious, noticed that Jonny and Josh were headed toward them. She told them of how Josh had freed them, and then of Josh's death.

There was silence as everyone mourned Josh. Then Race turned toward Jonny, asking him to fill in the holes. Emotionless, Jonny told them of running from the guards, of meeting Marcus, and their plans. He told them about his luck kicking in and him finding himself in the main communications room, and how he had messed with the system so that they could escape. He did not say anything about Josh's death.

Race closed his eyes as Jonny finished. He did not know what had gone wrong, but he intended to find out. Looking over at Jonny, he noted his pale face and dull eyes. Out of them all, Josh's death was affecting Jonny the most.



"None of this was your fault." Race spoke to the whole group, but everyone knew the words were mainly aimed at Jonny. "No one could control Grizzly. It was his decision to go down that hallway that ultimately ended his life. None of you can blame yourself."

Guiltily, Race realized that he was glad that it was not Jonny or Jessie who had been killed during the mission.

"We will, of course," Race continued, "be holding a memorial service for Grizzly. While we can't have a funeral, we will remember his life and all that he gave to Dulab." He walked over to Jonny and laid a hand on his shoulder. "Apollo, I know you're grieving for Grizzly, and I know that you would do anything you could to get him back. Please don't blame yourself."

"I should have told him," Jonny said quietly.

"Told him what?" Race wondered.

"Anything," Jonny replied. "If I had, things might have come out differently."

Race shook his head. "Apollo, you don't know that. And you can't afford to play that game."

"But . . . " Jonny began.

"But nothing," Race interrupted. "What happened, happened. It was Josh's decision, and nothing you said or can say will change that. You can't change the past. All you can do is learn from it and hope to make a difference in the future." He looked around at the group. "Take the next two days off. When you come back we'll see what we can do about filling the hole. I know this isn't going to be easy. But together I know you guys can get through it. Regardless of anything else, Josh loved Quinque and only wanted the best for it. If there's anyone who wants to leave and join another Task Force, I won't stop you."

Xander shook his head. "No, I want to stay here."

Dion nodded. "As so do I," he signed. He turned to face Jonny. "Apollo, we all know the differences between you and Grizzly. It was those differences that finally killed him. Well, Xander and I have been talking and we want you to know that, without a shadow of a doubt, we believe in you and your ability to lead this Task Force. I know it doesn't sound like much, not after Josh, but well, we just wanted you to know."

Jonny gave his group a small, tired grin. "Thanks."

\* \* \*

A week later, Sultan called Apollo into his office. When Jonny got there, he walked in to find his brother talking to a young woman with brown hair that fell to the middle of her back.

"Apollo," Hadji greeted. "I'd like you to meet Ashley Ray. Ashley, this is Apollo, Quinque's leader."

"Nice to meet you." Ashley turned around in the chair to shake hands with Jonny.

As Jonny took her hand, Hadji studied his brother. Jonny still had dark circles under his blue eyes, but he seemed better. He knew that Jessie had been by Jonny's side for the past week. Eventually Jonny would be able to forgive himself for Josh's death.

"Ashley is good with electronics," Hadji said. "Race feels she could be a helpful addition to Quinque."

Jonny glanced at Hadji, a haunted look in his eyes. Hadji suddenly realized that Jonny was not sure if he wanted to continue being in Quinque.

"I heard about what happened in Amarillo," Ashley said quietly.

Jonny only nodded stiffly.

"I can imagine all of Quinque is taking it pretty hard," she continued.

"You could say that," Jonny replied coldly.

Jonny glanced at Hadji, who only shrugged.

"I can only imagine how hard this past week has been for you."

"I hate to seem rude, Ashley, but I was wondering where exactly you were going with this," Jonny said.

"Quinque, with you at its head, has done this country so much good. Think of all the things that could have happened but didn't just because you were a part of Quinque. Josh's death was a terrible accident. But you don't have to punish yourself for someone else's mistakes. And what would have happened to Quinque if you hadn't been there? How would the others have escaped? Without your leadership, do you think they would still be alive, much less back here in Columbus instead of Austin?"

Jonny shook his head. "You weren't there . . . "

"Yeah, I realize that," Ashley interrupted. "You're right. I don't know exactly what happened. But I do know that I would never want to join Quinque unless you were its leader."

Jonny sighed and closed his eyes. "Why? Why am I such a pivotal factor?"

"Because I trust you, Apollo."

Hearing his call sign jerked him back into reality. "And what would your call sign be, Ashley?"

"Sandman. And what would your real name be, Apollo?"

Jonny laughed at her audacity. He looked at Hadji, who shrugged again, and then decided to throw caution to the wind. Secrets were

part of what had driven a wedge between Josh and him, and he would not let that happen again.

"Jonny Quest."

Ashley gave him a big smile. "It's nice to meet you."

"You, too. Welcome to Quinque."

End  
file.